

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs  
Soldiers and Sailors Building  
425 East Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, S.D. 57501

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**NOTE:** Corresponding photos are available upon request by contacting Mr. Roger C. Anderson at email address – [roger.anderson5@us.army.mil](mailto:roger.anderson5@us.army.mil)

## Veterans service officers recognized for dedicated service

*By Roger C. Anderson*  
*Public Information Officer*

PIERRE, S.D. – Cited for their strong dedication to serving veterans and their families, three county/tribal veteran service officers (C/TVSO) and one support staff member were recognized at an awards program held Monday night, Aug. 25, at the Pierre American Legion Cabin.

The annual event, organized by the S.D. Division of Veterans Affairs, was held in conjunction with the veterans' benefits training workshop for county and tribal VSOs from throughout the state.

"Over the years, a number of these people have gone above and beyond what is normally expected of their position," said Maj. Gen. Steven Doohen, secretary of the Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs. "It is certainly time to begin recognizing them for their actions."

Loy Carda, of Lemmon, received the 'Jim Melgaard Award' that distinguishes him as the 2008 County/Tribal Veteran Service Officer of the Year. As the VSO for Perkins County, Carda was responsible in purchasing a van for the Disabled American Veterans and assisted with driving and scheduling its use. He developed a program to provide veterans with medical equipment at no cost; provides excellent outreach and public information to his local veterans and their families; assists local veterans in the applying for various benefits programs; and has a positive approach in finding solutions to difficult issues.

Bobby G. Miller, of Plankinton, was awarded the 2008 Excellence in Outreach, 'Robert Lindblad Award.' Representing Aurora and Brule counties, Miller is involved in organizing all types of veterans' forums. He has played a key role in assisting local veterans in obtaining their medals and awards. On a monthly basis, Miller transports clothing, furniture and other items to the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

He also makes special trips to the Veterans Home at Christmas or if a veteran needs transportation for enrollment in the Home.

Eric Johnson, of Pierre, was selected for the 2008 Excellence in Veterans Education, 'Les Mord Award.' Johnson was cited for his excellence in promoting training programs in his tri-county area that includes Stanley, Hughes, and Sully Counties. He has taken the 'extra step' to ensure that those eligible for VA educational benefits are aware of the many educational and vocational opportunities that are available to them.

Faye Johnston, of Sisseton, received the 2008 Support Staff of the Year Award. She was recognized for her dedication and caring approach in helping Roberts County veterans and their families.

Also highlighted at the ceremony, were three county and one tribal veteran service officers who are World War II veterans. Each received a shadow-box containing an arrangement of three commemorative World War II belt buckles. The combined efforts of these four individuals total of more than 146 years of dedicated service to veterans.

The WWII veterans include: Fred R. Cozad, Martin, 59 years as Bennett County VSO; Allen G. Hellesund, Timber Lake, 31 years as Dewey County VSO; Ralph 'Doc' Pesicka, Dupree, 31 years as Ziebach County VSO; and Oliver Brown Wolf, Eagle Butte, 25 years as Cheyenne River Sioux TVSO.

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, please contact George Summerside, acting director of S.D. Dept. of Veterans Affairs at (605) 773-4981 or Roger C. Anderson, information officer, at (605) 737-6268 or (605) 391-8197.

**\*NOTE – MORE ABOUT THE AWARDS**

**2008 C/T Veteran Service Officer of the Year - Jim Melgaard Award:**

Jim Melgaard was the CVSO for Hughes, Stanley, and Sully Counties from 1993 to 2006. He was never reluctant to diligently search for that one piece of evidence that was needed to verify a veterans claim. Wherever he went, be it business or social events, he talked about veterans' benefits and programs. One Veterans' Benefits Forums he organized drew over 200 local veterans and family members.

Due to Melgaard's enthusiasm and dedication, the clientele of his office doubled during his tenure. One of his proudest moments was the opening of a VA community-based Outpatient Clinic in Pierre. Jim worked tirelessly, attending meetings and speaking with numerous people and groups, to achieve this goal. Veterans for miles around Pierre now have much easier access to health care.

During this time, he gave true meaning to the words – dedication – loyalty – and caring for the veterans and their family members in his area.

### **Excellence in Outreach - Robert Lindblad Award:**

Robert Lindblad was the CVSO for Beadle County from 1980 to 1995. He requested, received and presented more than 2,500 service medals and awards to 457 area veterans or their surviving family members. He personally transported surviving WWI veterans to their State Conventions each year until none remained. Lindblad personally sent condolence letters to the families of every Beadle County veteran who passed away and served on the funeral honor guard and rarely missed a funeral in his 15 years of service. In 1991, he received the Chester Sorenson - Veteran of the Year Award from the South Dakota Veterans Council.

### **2008 Excellence in Veterans Education - Les Mord Award:**

Les Mord served more than 30 years as program manager at South Dakota's State Approving Agency. At one time during his career, 500-plus training programs were active with veterans receiving training and South Dakota became the model for other states in outreach and approval of training programs. Mord was a true advocate for schools and establishing training programs for veterans. He was always ready to remove any obstacle to ensure veterans had the opportunity to use their educational benefits.

### **2008 Support Staff of the Year Award:**

This award recognizes the achievements of staff members that support the county and tribal veteran service officers. Without their assistance, many of our veterans and their families would not receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

### **Special Recognition of WWII Veterans Service Officers:**

Fred Cozad, of Martin, enlisted in the Army Air Corp in 1943 and served as a sergeant in the Proving Grounds Command. He was appointed Bennett County CVSO in late 1949 and has served in this capacity for 59 years. Fred also served on the Governing Board of the State Veterans Home in the 1950s.

Ralph 'Doc' Pesicka, of Dupree, enlisted in the Army in 1943 and served stateside in the Army Air Corps as a signal specialist. He built and repaired radios until his discharge in 1945. He was appointed as CVSO of Ziebach County in January 1977 and has served in this capacity for 31 years.

Al Hellesund, of Timber Lake, enlisted in the Army in 1942 and was a combat engineer during the Invasion of North Africa and later served in the European Theatre. He was appointed CVSO of Dewey County in February 1977 and has served in this capacity for 31 years.

Oliver Brown Wolf, of Eagle Butte, enlisted in the Army in 1943 and served in the European Theatre. He was later awarded the Bronze Star-Valor for his actions as an infantry scout during battles in France. He was appointed as a tribal veterans service officer for the Cheyenne River Sioux in September 1983 and has served in this capacity for 25 years.